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John Kerr: A Scholar Who Also Acts

Young Star Pursues High Degrees

By DON ROSS

John Kerr, the tortured preschoolboy in "Tea and Sympathy," met the girl he later married in a Serbo-Croatian class af Harvard. She was a Radcliffe undergraduate.

The meeting place is characteristic of Mr Kerr, who was voted last year in the annual "Variety" poll the most promising new young actor on Broadway. Other men have met their future wives at cocktail parties, picnics or movies. But Mr. Kerr, who is twenty-two, is an intensely serious man. It is doubtful that he goes to cocktail parties, picnics or movies.

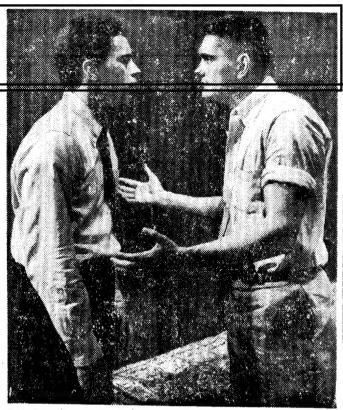
He no longer goes to Serbo-Croatian classes, Instead he goes to classes in Old Russian literature, nineteenth-century Russian literature, political institutions of the Soviet Union, the Soviet Union in international affairs and Soviet history. In addition to his work in "Tea and Sympathy", in which he plays opposite Deborah Kerr (no relation), Mr. Kerr is a fulltime student in the Russian Institute at Columbia University. Having acquired a Harvard A. B., he is now working for an literature.

woman whose name was Priscilla Smith when John met her At Harvard, from which he wins his fights, this doesn't "At Harvard in my freshman at Harvard, is now a Russian- was graduated in 1952, Mr. Kerr bother him too much. He loses a year," he said. "Harvard opened English translator for "The did work at the Russian Re-fight, however, and this is a up a whole new world to me of Current Digest of the Soviet search Center. One of his jobs shattering experience. The story, books and culture. I appeared in Press." a private publication was to do some coding on quesfeirculating among American tionnaires for Russian-speaking ending. In the displaced persons in Europe. What educators, and others interested in keeping informed about Rus-

For four months in the fall of 1952, Mrs. Kerr worked in Cen-tral Intelligence Agency in Washington. In December of that year she and John were ing career. His mother is June married and she quit her job. Walker, who recently appeared What she did for C. I. A. is a here in "Ladies of the Corridor," secret shared only by Mrs Kerr and the C. I. A. She won't even the English actor and writer. tell John.

No Radical

studying about Russia at Har-vard right after the Korean War at his writing in his Greenwich began in 1950. I had the idea Village apartment. It's fiction that you should know your enemy. A lot of misunderstand-larly commercial." ing arises because some people



John Kerd and Dick York, who plays his roommate, in "Tea and Sympathy," the hit play at the Ethel Barrymore Theater.

M. A. in Slavic language and who don't know enough get up. In one of his short stories a and yell. Well, if I'm going to do prizefighter in his middle twen-

Mr. Kerr, who comes from a Mr. Kerr was asked. theatrical family, made a hit "Nothing," he said last season in "Bernardine," the only other Broadway show he has appeared in. That success and his present one have made it pretty obvious that he is headed for a distinguished actand his father Geoffrey Kerr,

Wants To Be a Writer

"Acting doesn't fill any par-"I don't want people to get the impression from this inter-the impression from this inter-the impression from this inter-the impression from the impression from this inter-the impression from the impress

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"What does the fighter do?"

year-old boy who lives with his domineering chauvinistic grand-mother. He has a recurrent ments offered to him. dream in which he imagines that his father is alive and everything to play the part of a Mexican is pleasant. The little boy goes Indian bullfighter in a playlet out to play one day with some by Budd Schulberg on "Omniolder children. They are play-bus." Mr. Kerr turned it down. ing war and he is chosen as the enemy. He gets into a hole while Indian?" Mr. Kerr asked, rather they throw rocks and tin cans at unnecessarily.

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him. The little boy raises his head. A rock hits him, but doesn't hurt him seriously. The little boy lies down and the recurrent dream comes over him.

When he attended Exeter Mr. Kerr felt that acting was to be his career. Summers, he was an apprentice at the Cape Play-house at Dennis, Mass., and appeared there with the late Gertrude Lawrence in "O Mistress Mine" and "September Tide." At Harvard he played in the Brattle Theater productions of Melville's "Billy Budd" and Christopher Fry's "A Sleep of Prisoners." It was the latter play that brought him to the attention of Guthrie McClintic, the producer, then looking for some one to play the role of Air Force Cadet Arthur Beaumont in "Bernardine."

Acted for Money

"When did it occur to you that

there was money in it.

Mr. Kerr is a fairly familiar face on television, having acted "Nothing," he said. in such shows as "You Are There," "Suspense," "The Web"